



African Conservation Leadership Network Charter | April 2019

Background

The African Conservation Leadership Network (ACLN) was initiated and piloted by Maliasili and The Nature Conservancy in 2016 with the aim to strengthen organizational leadership in the region's conservation and natural resources field, and take initial steps towards establishing a peer-learning network. The network's members are 32 leaders from 17 African organizations, who have each completed three learning seminars over the course of a year. At the end of January 2019, they came together at the first ACLN Forum and defined the purpose and future role for the ACLN. Their contributions form the basis for this ACLN Charter. The charter outlines how the network intends to function and acts as a guideline for its governance. The charter is intended to be a living and dynamic document which will be amended as the purpose and role of the network continue to evolve.

Purpose of the ACLN

The purpose of the ACLN is to achieve greater conservation impact in Africa by improving the quality and effectiveness of leaders of local organizations that work with communities to protect their land, natural resources and livelihoods. Through the ACLN, this new generation of leaders can connect, develop and maintain relationships – a dedicated space for support and advice-sharing knowledge, information and expertise. The ACLN is also a platform for African conservation leaders to expand their joint influence and to convene strategic thought leaders.

The ACLN is based on the premise that in order to increase and scale conservation impacts, local organizations need to be strong and effective, and their leaders ought to be equipped through training, coaching and mentoring to become better leaders and to make their organizations more impactful. The ACLN values alliances and collaborative action, and seeks ways to link the efforts of its members and the landscapes in which they work.

The ACLN Going Forward

The cohort identified key functions for the ACLN:

1. To continue learning and catalyzing leadership development through practical training, peer coaching and mentorship aimed at improving organizational management and leadership capacity.
2. To share knowledge and best practice on organizational leadership, management and community-based conservation approaches, e.g. through the use of technical tools, and to create a platform to house and share this information.
3. To build the network, grow trust, foster friendships and develop a shared vision through continued interactions and collaborations.
4. To establish a collective African voice that advocates for pressing conservation issues and influences policies to improve community-based conservation.
5. To collectively leverage funds and seek joint fundraising opportunities

Core Values of the ACLN

The ACLN is built upon the premise that:

- Sharing of information and solutions is a driver for change
- Trusted friendships that develop as members share experiences and challenges are the basis for partnerships and collaborations
- The challenges that conservation leaders face are daunting – they can achieve more by working together
- Leaders draw strength and credibility from having their ‘boots on the ground’ , i.e. they are both leaders and implementers
- It is important to find the right balance between structure and adaptability – and to remain informal enough to maintain interest and energy
- Leaders achieve conservation outcomes together not because they are part of institutions but because they are like-minded individuals with a common sense of purpose
- The ACLN brand is only as strong as its members and every member is responsible for living up to its core values

Governance and Management

Coordinating the network

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and Maliasili designed and implemented the first phase of the ACLN.

ACLN is important to TNC because creating strong and durable local conservation organizations is a key component of our transformational theory of change for protecting priority ecosystems. The people and wildlife that depend on large scale functioning and resilient ecosystems are guided and supported every day by local organizations with strong science, convening and policy support that TNC provides. ACLN offers a critical network for ongoing capacity development, sharing and learning that will enable these organizations to be stronger than without ACLN.

In line with Maliasili's purpose to strengthen African conservation organizations, Maliasili is invested in the success of the ACLN as well. At the request of the members and with support from TNC, Maliasili has agreed to continue coordinating the network – working as ACLN's 'anchor'. This is a two-fold role of maintaining and growing the network. Tasks included in this coordination and convening role include:

- Facilitating the flow of information and being responsible for central communication.
- Developing approaches for continuous learning, e.g. drawing on the expertise of ACLN members to arrange webinars on relevant themes, facilitating refresher training.
- Connecting ACLN members to potential partners, donors and opportunity for continuous training, learning, and potential funding.
- Developing a technical repository of approaches, resources and tools (e.g. on CBNRM facilitation etc.) and establishing a simple platform that provides easy access to the technical repository, sharing a range of resources, virtual spaces for sharing expertise and peer inputs around ongoing or focused issues (e.g. Slack).
- Provide needs-based coaching and mentoring.
- Liaising and consulting with the four-member ACLN committee selected from the cohort to ensure the involvement of the members in selection of further cohort/s, and planning ACLN initiatives.
- Tracking collaboration and learning exchanges - evaluating what they lead to, assessing and communicating outcomes, impacts and lessons learned.

Decision-making in the network

Maliasili is not a member of the network but it coordinates and facilitates the network in so far as this is useful to the members. Maliasili also provides a communication function and (together with TNC) fundraising service for the network. As the network grows, there is an increasing need for some level of structure. The ACLN has nominated a smaller group from among its membership made up of two representatives from each of the two cohorts. The representatives represent each of the countries that are part of the network. These four representatives, together with Maliasili's ACLN coordinator and an appropriate representative from TNC, form the ACLN's standing committee.

All members of the network and committee are invited to solicit and nominate organizations for the third cohort. Based on the nominations and application received, the committee will be involved in short-listing and selecting the future cohort members. Once the third cohort is selected and has participated in training seminars, the committee could be expanded by including a further two members nominated by the third cohort. Any possible further expansion of the network beyond the third cohort, should consider maintaining a size that fosters intimacy and meaningful engagement. Further roles for the network representatives on the standing committee, beyond cohort selection, are expected to emerge over time.

Convening the network

A biennial gathering will be held involving the ACLN cohorts and specially invited guests who are thought leaders in African conservation. The next ACLN Forum is planned for 2021.

Selection criteria for network membership

The ACLN targets the leaders of outstanding, high-potential conservation organizations working in eastern and southern Africa, as its focal geographic area.

The criteria for invited organizations:

- Organizations should have a recognized track record in conservation and their work should involve the communities in their target areas
- Organizations should be registered and operating locally, in the eastern and southern Africa
- Organizations should be locally-established and not-for-profit, but social enterprises will also be considered
- The two selected participants from each organization are both expected to commit to each of three training sessions and to participate in subsequent ACLN Forum and other ACLN events
- Organizations with existing TNC and Maliasili relationships will be given higher preference.

Process for selection and growth of network membership

Since its inception in 2016, there have been two ACLN cohorts. A third cohort, focusing on organizations operating in Southern Africa, is planned for 2019/20.

The ACLN membership will be invited to nominate organizations to the conveners (Maliasili and TNC) for participation in the program. Nominations should include a short description of why the nominated organization would be a strong candidate for inclusion in ACLN and would both benefit from, and contribute to, the network. Nominations can include the names of proposed candidates from nominated organizations for participation in the ACLN, though this is not mandatory.

1. Nominated organizations will be invited by the conveners to apply for participation in the program. Applications should include:
 - » A motivation statement for the organization's participation specifying why it wants to participate in ACLN.

- » Specification of who would be the selected two individuals they would put forward for participation in the ACLN and why they have been chosen, including their CVs. The two proposed individuals for participation in the program would usually be the ED/CEO and another key member of the senior management team.
- 2. Applications will be reviewed by a coordinating group comprising the conveners and network's standing committee.
- 3. Organizations will be informed of the outcome of their application and three workshops that will be spread roughly over an 8-12 month period will be scheduled.

Conditions for membership of the network

ACLN membership is dependent on individuals remaining in leadership position in the selected organizations. If an ACLN member leaves his/her position in the selected organization, for whatever reason, they will surrender their place in the network. In this situation, the selected organizations cannot substitute the member who has left with another employee, as membership of the ACLN requires participation in the three week-long training seminars.

Original purpose of ACLN

ACLN framework to date

The ACLN's key objective to date has been to strengthen the leadership capacity of key individuals working within African natural resource management and conservation. The ACLN targets mid-career leaders of outstanding, high-potential organizations in eastern and southern Africa within the conservation and natural resources field.

Through its work since 2016, the ACLN has already:

- Brought together a cohort of emerging, exceptional African conservation and natural resource organizational leaders in a process of peer learning and exchange designed to improve their individual leadership abilities and influence their organizations and wider networks and systems.
- Developed a practical curriculum for strengthening local organizational management and leadership, customized to the local organizational leaders' needs and priorities, through a mixture of peer exchange, exposure to leading ideas and practices, provision of practical tools and methods, and group exercises and applications.
- Created a nascent network of African organizational leaders in the natural resources and conservation field that has begun to enable greater exchange and cross-pollination of diverse practices and experiences, and enhanced the potential for future collective action.

Learning Seminars

Participation in the ACLN begins with a cohort of leaders from selected African organizations working through a set of three learning seminars over the course of a year. The overall framework of the program is based on leadership at three distinct scales:

- **Individual or personal leadership skills.** This relates to how an individual develops their own personal skills and characteristics as a leader, including self-awareness of one's own attributes and behavioral patterns, how one relates to and interacts with other people, and managing oneself (e.g. motivation, avoiding burnout).
- **Organizational leadership and management skills.** This pertains to the leadership of organizations as a group of people working towards common aims, and includes many aspects of organizational management such as strategy, staffing, resourcing etc.
- **Leadership at the systems level.** This aspect of leadership extends beyond one's own organization, to the scale of a complex set of actors whose interactions are critical to achieving large-scale, systemic change. For example, changing government policies or institutions, or achieving change at the landscape scale, generally requires collaboration and collective action beyond the capacity of any single organization. It requires leaders being able to get many different actors, with different ideas, interests, powers and personalities, to work together to achieve shared goals.

ACLN Forum

At the end January 2019, an event – the ACLN Forum - was convened where the network met with external colleagues and supporters for focused discussions on critical strategic issues in ways that led to new insights, opportunities, and practical actions being identified for conservation in Africa.

As with the first event, the forum's core purpose in future will be to create a convening space for leading African conservation organizations to learn, innovate, and build collaborations that can help them accelerate their impacts on the ground.